



Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 10, 2021

Testimony In Support of

**House Bill No. 6578 An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process; and
Senate Bill No. 1017- An Act Concerning Election Administration**

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Maureen Chalmers, and I am President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (4Cs), which represents 3,500 members at the twelve community colleges and 500 adjunct members at the University of Hartford.

First, I want to thank Connecticut legislators, the Secretary of the State, and the Governor for making voting safer and expanding access for all voters in the 2020 elections. Because of your bipartisan support for commonsense voting reform during a pandemic, more than 650,000 absentee ballots were securely cast in Connecticut yielding a record-breaking voter participation rate of almost 80%! What a wonderful affirmation of democracy. It is something for us all to be proud of.

Second, I would like to ask you to support HB 6578, with improvements. The bill as it is written would only codify Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV). AVR needs to be expanded to include to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, the Department of Developmental Services, state colleges and universities and other state agencies. This is a common-sense reform that is popular with a majority of CT voters, it saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation for disenfranchised residents and communities.

HB 6578 would also restore voting rights to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole. This must happen. Disenfranchising people on parole perpetuates a racist system of inequality in our state. Those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities—those with significant populations of Black and Latino people.

I was shocked and ashamed to learn that Connecticut has the most stringent criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast, and it is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. It is time for Connecticut to follow suit with 20 other states allow people on parole to vote. New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole, two weeks ago. The time for Connecticut to follow suit is long overdue.

Lastly, I am asking you to support SB 1017 which is necessary so that voters who qualify to vote absentee, will retain the right to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.

I urge you to continue with the good work you started in 2020 in expanding voter access.

Maureen Chalmers
President
The 4Cs, SEIU Local 1973